



The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation



Prepared Statement of the Honorable D.R. Michel on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Field Hearing on Issues Affecting Forest Health and Management in Eastern Washington

U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

August 29, 2005

Chairman Walden, Representative McMorris and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (the "Tribe") I would like to welcome you and your staff to eastern Washington. My name is D.R. Michel, and I am a member of the Colville Business Council, the governing body of the Tribe. I currently serve as the Chairman of the Colville Business Council's Natural Resources Committee, and in that capacity am responsible for overseeing the Tribe's management and development of its natural resources. Thank you for giving the Tribe the opportunity to make this statement regarding what we consider our successes in forest management.

Background on the Tribe

I would like to take this opportunity to provide some brief background on the Tribe. Although now considered a single Indian tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation is, as the name suggests, a confederation of 12 smaller aboriginal tribes and bands from all across eastern Washington State. The Colville Reservation covers approximately 1.4 million acres, and its boundaries include parts of Okanogan and Ferry counties. The Tribe has nearly 9,200 enrolled members, making it one of the largest Indian tribes in the Pacific Northwest and the second largest in the State of Washington. About half of the Tribe's members live on or near the Colville Reservation.

The Tribe's primary economic activity is in developing its natural resources, particularly forestry. The Colville Reservation has approximately 900,000 forested acres (both commercial and noncommercial forest). Natural resource management, particularly forest management, is critical to the economic well-being and success of the Tribe.

Together, the Tribe and its enterprises are the largest employers in north-central Washington State, with the largest number of employees working in the natural resources area. The Tribe's Natural Resources Department has approximately 375 employees. Within the Natural Resources Department, the Tribe's Forestry program employs approximately 175. The

Tribe's Forestry program, in turn, provides work for other timber jobs, including log truck drivers, contract loggers and slashing crews, which together add an additional 200 jobs. In addition, the Tribe has two lumber mills, Colville Indian Precision Pine and Colville Indian Power and Veneer, respectively, that combined employ upward of 375 individuals. All these jobs, of course, have a secondary economic impact on the local economies, both on and off-reservation.

The Tribe's Integrated Resources Management Plan

The Tribe's on-reservation forest has a standing volume of approximately 5 billion board feet. To safeguard, preserve and enhance the forest, the Tribe has developed an Integrated Resources Management Plan ("IRMP") as well as a Forest Management Plan ("FMP"), which is tied to the IRMP. Under these plans, the Tribe has an annual allowable cut of 77.8 million board feet. Our actual average harvest from fiscal years 2002-2004 has been slightly higher due to fire salvage timber sales resulting from several large fires. Generally, Douglas-Fir/Western Larch and Ponderosa Pine have made up the vast majority of our timber harvests.

The IRMP guides our Natural Resources staff regarding the management of our natural resources on the Colville Reservation. All of the programs in the Tribe's Natural Resources Department – including our Forestry, Fish & Wildlife, Environmental Trust, Roads, Range, Parks & Recreation, Inventory & Analysis, and Realty programs – must follow guidelines and standards regarding management of their specific resource. The IRMP for the Colville Reservation was developed through a series of staff and public meetings. To efficiently address environmental concerns, an Environmental Impact Statement was completed for the overall IRMP. This allows fulfillment of National Environmental Protection Agency ("NEPA") requirements as the component pieces of the IRMP (including, for example, the Forest Management Plan) move forward with individual Environmental Assessments as long as they are consistent with the IRMP.

The Tribe has a Cooperative Agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs ("BIA") through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. § 450 *et seq.* The Cooperative Agreement has allowed the Tribe and the BIA to work together for better natural resource management. Because of the working relationships among our Tribe, our enterprises, and the BIA, we have been able to incorporate resource management activities into our timber sale contracts that otherwise could not have been included in contracts with non-enterprise entities.

Examples of the Tribe's Forest Management Practices

All timber sale projects go through the Colville Reservation Project Proposal Planning process, an interdisciplinary process that considers the concerns and issues of other tribal programs and the Tribal membership in general. The Tribe requires all natural resource projects

to be submitted for this type of review. The extent and level of planning usually depends on the size, scope, and complexity of the proposed project.

The Tribe has also conducted pre-commercial thinning activities as a regular part of its forest management practices, both as a part of our timber sales and as stand-alone projects. In addition, as funding allows, the Tribe has undertaken both Wildland-Urban Interface and hazardous fuel reduction projects. Regeneration harvest units in our timber sales also have site preparation done, either through our Prescribed Burning program or our Forest Development program (excavator piling, etc.).

In fiscal year 2005, the Tribe successfully completed 587 Wildland-Urban Interface acres as well 20 hazardous fuel reduction acres. While these efforts have occurred on tribally-controlled lands, we have also worked with private landowners adjacent to the Tribe's lands on the same issues, reducing the likelihood of serious fires.

Unfortunately, no amount of prevention can prevent all wildfires. Accordingly, the Tribe participates extensively in firefighting and fire management, including the formation of Incident Management Teams. In 2003, the Colville Reservation had 67 fires that scorched a total of 14,011 acres. Of these 67 fires, two were "Type 2" fires: the Rattlesnake Canyon Fire and the McGinnis Flats Fire. In 2004, we had 168 fires totaling 8,422 acres, the most serious being the Hopkins Canyon Fire and Elmer City Fire – both Type 2 fires. To date for 2005, we have had 54 fires that have burned a total of 16,048 acres.

In part because of the Tribe's organization and integrated management of the forests, the Tribe has received federal funding to research and advance opportunities. For example, the Tribe participates in the Biomass Feasibility Study Project. This federally-funded project will determine the feasibility of utilizing logging slash from our timber sales as material for power generation needs at Colville Indian Power and Veneer's co-generation facility in Omak, Washington.

Similarly, while helicopter logging has generally been perceived as economically unfeasible, the Tribe has recently demonstrated that helicopter logging can be both feasible and be conducted in a manner that achieves our natural resource management objectives. In fact, in some cases, helicopter logging can be the most ecologically sound method for preserving natural wilderness areas.

Because of the Tribe's successful track record of forest management, the Colville Business Council is considering the possibilities of "stewardship contracting" with the Okanogan, Wenatchee, and Colville National Forests pursuant to the Tribal Forest Protection Act, which was enacted with the strong support of Chairman Pombo and the Resources Committee. We believe that our management style offers a model that could benefit private land owners, counties, state and local schools, and the public in our area. An integrated approach would necessarily involve all interested individuals in the planning process with a focus on

maintaining the health and continued vigor of all resources while recognizing the needs, both social and economical.

Of course, these forest management activities can be expensive to implement. While we appreciate the support that the federal government provides, it is important to remember that funding for Indian Country forest management is, and has been, consistently lower than forest funding elsewhere in the United States. For example, in 2001, tribal forest management programs received \$2.83 per acre while the National Forests received \$9.51 per acre. At the same time, tribal programs received slightly more per acre funding for fires.¹ No one will dispute that it is important to fight fires, but to the degree that good management can prevent fire loss, Indian tribes lose out on the opportunity because of the disparity in management funding. If the Tribe received more funding for forest management, more could be done for the natural resources, which, in turn, would benefit the economy in our region.

Thank you for allowing the Tribe to make this statement. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to enhance forest management. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittee members may have.

¹ *An Assessment of Indian Forests and Forest Management in the United States*, The Second Indian Forest Management Assessment Team for the Intertribal Timber Council, December, 2003